



# Vessel Traffic Service St. Marys River User's Manual



**Sixth Edition**  
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## History of Soo Traffic

On March 6, 1896 Title 33 USC 474 was enacted into law. This directed the Commandant of the Revenue Cutter Service (precursor to the US Coast Guard) to prescribe appropriate rules and regulations regarding the movement and anchorage of vessels and rafts in the St Marys River from Point Iroquois on Lake Superior to Point De Tour on Lake Huron. This marked the beginning of the St Marys River Vessel Traffic Management System (VTMS).

Originally named the River Patrol Service, the first VTMS was comprised of the Revenue Cutter MORRILL and Lookout Stations at Johnson's Pt (#1), Middle Neebish Dyke (#2) and Little Rapids Cut (#3). Lookouts communicated with passing ships by kerosene lanterns and signal flags. Often messages were delivered to passing ships by lookouts rowing out to them in small dinghies. Later, the lookout stations were connected by telegraph lines linked back to the Pittsburgh Steamship Company offices in Sault Sainte Marie, MI. Throughout the next several decades, a number of lookout stations were established and then closed as needs and funding levels fluctuated. At one point there were 11 active lookout stations along the St Marys River.



“Soo Control”, the original call sign for the vessel traffic management system, relied heavily on mariners voluntarily communicating information on traffic flow and navigation hazards. Formerly renamed the Vessel Traffic Service in 1975, participation in what became a vessel movement reporting system remained voluntary. In October 1994, enact by the Oil and Pollution Act of 1990, participation for vessels greater than 65 feet became mandatory. VTS St Marys River currently operates year round with a 77 nautical mile area of responsibility that spans the length of the St. Marys River.

## INTRODUCTION

The VTS User's Manual provides users with the necessary information to participate in the St. Marys River Vessel Traffic Service (VTS). The manual contains and references regulations, which are published in Title 33, Code of Federal Regulations (33 CFR). It also contains supplementary text, not part of the regulations, intended to be explanatory in nature. The U.S. Coast Guard will keep the manual current with any changes issued to the regulations. Changes of a temporary nature will be issued via a Broadcast Notice to Mariners and if made permanent incorporated in the next edition of the User's Manual.

VTS St. Marys River is a Vessel Movement Reporting System (VMRS) established under the authority of the Ports and Waterways Safety Act. The goal of the reporting system is to facilitate the safe and efficient movement of participating vessels and provide additional information, which may affect vessel traffic safety within the Vessel Traffic Service Area (VTSA). The Vessel Traffic Center (VTC) is located in Sault Sainte Marie, Michigan. The VTC utilizes a VHF-FM communication network that is continuously manned by U.S. Coast Guard personnel. The VTC uses the radio call sign "Soo Traffic". The VTC processes information received from participating vessels and then disseminates the information to other participating vessels operating throughout the VTSA.

Information provided by "Soo Traffic" is to a large extent based upon reports from participating vessels and can be no more accurate than the information received. The U. S. Coast Guard may not be aware of all hazardous situations within the VTSA. Unreported hazards may confront the mariner at any time. Any impasse, conflict or hazardous condition(s) should be reported to "Soo Traffic" immediately.

The efficient operation of the VTS and safe navigation through the VTSA depends upon mariners observing published operating procedures both day and night and in all weather conditions. The U.S. Coast Guard welcomes any suggestions that may improve this manual or the function of VTS St. Marys River.

## **SECTION - I - GENERAL**

### **PURPOSE AND APPLICABILITY**

**Vessel Traffic Service (VTS) St. Marys River** exists to provide the mariner with information related to the safe navigation of the VTSA. The VTS is designed to enhance navigation, vessel safety, marine environmental protection, and promote safe vessel movement by reducing the potential for collisions, ramming, groundings, loss of lives and property associated with these incidents within the VTSA. Under certain circumstances, the VTS may issue directions to control the movement of a vessel in order to minimize the risk of collision or damage to the environment.

The owner, operator, master, or person directing the movement of a vessel remains at all times responsible for the manner in which the vessel is operated and maneuvered, and is responsible for the safe navigation of the vessel under all circumstances. Nothing set forth by the VTS is intended to relieve the vessel, owner, operator or person directing the movement of the vessel from the consequences of any neglect to comply with any applicable law and/or regulation.

The provisions of this manual and 33 CFR shall apply to each VTS user, and may apply to any vessel while underway or at anchor in the navigable waters of the VTSA.

**VTS Measures (33 CFR 161.11)** A VTS may issue measures or directions to enhance navigation and vessel safety and to protect the marine environment, such as, but not limited to:

- o Designate temporary reporting points and procedures.
- o Imposing vessel operating requirements.
- o Establishing vessel traffic routing schemes.

## DEFINITIONS

**Vessel Traffic Service (VTS)** means a service implemented by the United States Coast Guard designed to improve the safety and efficiency of vessel traffic and to protect the environment. The VTS has the capability to interact with marine traffic and respond to traffic situations developing in the VTSA. **VTS** in this user's manual means VTS St. Marys River.

**Vessel Traffic Service Area (VTSA)** means the geographic area of service for the VTS covering the navigable waters of the United States in the St. Marys River between 45-57 N. (**De Tour Reef Light**) in the south, to 46-38.7 N. (**Ile Parisienne Light**) in the north, except the waters of the St. Marys Falls Canal, and those navigable waters east of a line from 46-04.16 N. and 46-01.57 N (**La Pointe to Sims Point within Potagannissing Bay**).

**Vessel Movement Reporting System (VMRS)** means a system used to manage and track vessel movements within a VTSA. A VMRS is accomplished in part using information provided by the mariner and disseminated by the VTS.

**Vessel Movement Reporting System (VMRS) User** means a vessel, or owner, operator, charter, master or person directing the movement of a vessel that is required to participate in a VMRS within a VTSA. VMRS participation in VTS St. Marys River is required for:

- o Every power-driven vessel of 40 meters (approximately 131 ft.)\* or more in length, while navigating;
- o Every towing vessel of 8 meters (approximately 26 ft.) or more in length, while navigating; or
- o Every vessel certified to carry 50 or more passengers for hire, when engaged in trade.

**Note:** The Captain of the Port (COTP) Sault Sainte Marie determined the unique navigational requirements of the St. Marys River warrants all vessels subject to the Vessel Bridge to Bridge-Radiotelephone Act to participate as VMRS Users. COTP Sault Sainte Marie directs all vessels 65 feet (20 meters) or greater to report to "Soo Traffic" in accordance with 33 CFR Part 161.18.

## DEFINITIONS (cont)

**VTs User** means a vessel, owner, operator, charterer, master, or person directing the movements of a vessel that is:

- o Subject to the Vessel Bridge -to- Bridge Radiotelephone Act or
- o A VMRS User.

**“Soo Traffic”** is the VHF radio call sign for the shore-based facility that operates VTS St. Marys River. The Vessel Traffic Center is located in Sault Sainte Marie, Michigan.

**One-Way Traffic** means an area where meeting, turn-a-rounds, and over taking are prohibited.

**Two-Way Traffic** means that traffic flow is permitted in opposing directions, but a vessel may not meet, cross, nor overtake any other vessel in such a manner that it would be abreast of more than one other vessel within the defined limits of a waterway

**Open Navigation Season:** Also known as the Open Season. The Open Season is the period from when the Locks open (250001R March) to when the locks close (160001R January). The Coast Guard and U.S. Army Corps of Engineers are required to maintain navigation channels during this period.

**Winter Navigation Season:** Also known as the Winter Season. The Winter Season is the period from when the Locks close (160001R January) to when the locks open (250001R March). During the Winter Season, the Coast Guard and U.S. Army Corps of Engineers are not required to maintain navigable channels. However, infrequent icebreaker escorts of vessels carrying essential cargos may be conducted.

## DEFINITIONS (cont)

**OPERATION TACONITE:** Operation Taconite is the largest domestic icebreaking enterprise conducted in the continental United States. Operation Taconite starts when newly formed ice begins to hinder commercial navigation. With the commencement of Operation Taconite, additional movement requirements and/or restrictions may be imposed such as, reduced speed limits, special position reports, one-way traffic areas and additional waterway closures. There are three distinct operational periods to Operation Taconite. The first begins when ice becomes a hindrance to commercial movement and extends until the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers close the Sault Locks at 0500Z January 16. The second period begins with the Sault Locks closure and ends on or about March 10, preceding the Sault Locks opening by two weeks. The third period starts March 10 and is secured when ice no longer hinders commercial movements.

### Local Terminology

Lake Nicolet is known as “**Hay Lake**”

Munuscong Lake is known as “**Mud Lake**”

West Neebish Channel is known as “**Rock Cut**”

Waiska Bay is known as “**Whiskey Bay**”

Potagannissing Bay is known as “**Pot Bay**”

Potagannissing Bay-North Channel is known as the “**Turkey Trail**”.

### DESCRIPTION OF THE VTS

VTS St. Marys River consists of the navigable waters of the St. Marys River and lower Whitefish Bay between 45-56.54 N. (**De Tour Reef Light**) in the south, and 46-38.42 N. (**Ile Parisienne Light**) in the north, except the waters of the St. Marys Falls Canal, and to the east line from La Pointe to Sims Point within Potagannissing Bay and Tenby Bay (formally known as Worsley Bay on older navigational charts).

The VTS utilizes two VHF high-level antennas located in Sault Sainte Marie and Goetzville, Michigan as well as low-level VHF antennas located at the VTC and Whitefish Point.



## **DESCRIPTION OF THE VTS (cont)**

The VTS continuously monitors VHF Channels 8, 12, and 14 with Sector Sault Sainte Marie monitoring Channel 16. A radio watch on VHF Channel 16 is not required for vessels participating in VTS St. Marys River.

To aid in monitoring traffic and river conditions, the VTS employs six closed circuit television cameras. One camera is located in the upper river at Birch Point. There are five cameras positioned in the lower river. One is located on the mainland at Mission Point. A second is in the Middle Neebish Channel at Johnson's Point. Two additional cameras are in the West Neebish Channel, one located on the mainland above the Neebish Island ferry landing and one on Neebish Island atop the Lower Leading Light. The fifth camera is located on the mainland at the Drummond Island ferry landing. Additionally, the VTS receives a live feed from the Army Corps of Engineers that features video from four of their cameras positioned around the Sault Locks facility.

The VTS utilizes two Automated Information System (AIS) base stations to facilitate real time surveillance of the VTSA. In addition to the AIS data exchange, the base stations enable the VTS to send and receive binary messages with select AIS units employed by VTS users.

## **AUTHORITY TO DEVIATE FROM THESE RULES**

Commander, Ninth Coast Guard District and the VTS Director have the authority to grant deviations from these rules. Deviations will only be authorized if the appropriate official determines that the deviation will incorporate the same measure of safety as the original rule.

## **AUTHORITY TO DEVIATE FROM THESE RULES (cont)**

Requests to deviate from these rules for an extended period of time, or if anticipated before the start of a transit, must be submitted in writing to the Ninth Coast Guard District Commander. An application for deviation must state the need and fully explain the proposed alternative to the measure.

**Address:        Commander (dp)  
                     Ninth Coast Guard District  
                     1240 E. Ninth St.  
                     Cleveland, OH 44199-2060**

Requests for deviation due to circumstances that develop after a transit has begun may be made verbally to the VTS. Contact can be made through "Soo Traffic" on VHF Ch. 12 or by telephone at (906) 635-3232. The VTS Director may authorize a deviation if it is determined that, based on vessel handling characteristics, traffic density, other navigation equipment, environmental conditions and other relevant information, such as a deviation provides a level of safety equivalent to that provided by the required measure or is a maneuver considered necessary for safe navigation under the circumstances.

**Deviations are normally granted for a single transit or a short period of time.**

In an **emergency**, a person directing the movement of a vessel may deviate from any provision to the extent necessary to avoid endangering persons, property, or the environment. Any deviation from these rules or VTS direction should be reported to "Soo Traffic" as practicable.

## **SECTION - II - COMMUNICATIONS**

### **RADIOTELEPHONE LISTENING WATCH**

VTs and VMRS Users as described in the definition section of this Manual are required to maintain a radiotelephone listening watch on VHF Ch. 12 (156.6 MHz) while underway in the VTSA. [Special Marine Information Broadcasts are made on Ch. 22A (151.1 MHz)] In addition, any vessel transiting through the Sault Locks must be able to reach the Lock Master / WUE-21 who monitors VHF Ch. 14 (156.7 MHz).

Note: The Vessel Bridge to Bridge Radiotelephone Act requires vessels 20 meters (65 feet) or greater in length, to have on board a VHF-FM radio capable of transmitting and receiving in the 156-158 MHz marine band. They must also be capable of communicating in the English language and to monitor the frequencies designated for any VTS area in which they operate their vessel.

### **VESSEL REPORTING REQUIREMENTS**

Power-driven vessels 40m (approximately 131ft) and above shall:

- o Monitor VHF Ch. 12 and 13
- o Report to the VTS at reporting points

Power-driven vessels 20m (65ft) and above:

- o Monitor VHF Ch. 12 and 13
- o Report to the VTS at reporting points

Towing vessels 8m (approximately 26ft) and above:

- o Monitor VHF Ch. 12 and 13
- o Report to the VTS at reporting points

## **VESSEL REPORTING REQUIREMENTS (cont)**

Vessels certified to carry 50 or more passengers for hire:

- o Monitor VHF Ch. 12 and 13
- o Report to the VTS at reporting points

Vessels 100 GT carrying one or more passengers for hire:

- o Monitor VHF Ch. 12 and 13

Dredges and floating plants:

- o Monitor VHF Ch. 12 and 13

## **VESSEL REPORTS**

Reports made to “Soo Traffic” must be made in the English language and made from the navigation bridge of the vessel or control room of a dredge/tug.

**Initial reports (Sailing plans)** are made to “Soo Traffic” at least one hour prior to entering the VTS area, or 15 minutes prior to getting underway from mooring or anchoring within the VTS area:

Initial reports will include the following:

- o Vessel Name
- o Position
- o Destination
- o Cargo/Type of Tow
- o Draft.

**Position Reports** are made at designated reporting points or when directed by the VTS.

**Final Reports** are made when a vessel departs the VTSA at De Tour Reef Light, Potagannissing Bay, Gros Cap Reef Light, or when anchored or moored within the service area.

## **VESSEL REPORTS (cont)**

Masters of vessels will report to “Soo Traffic” any impairment to navigation, such as, but not limited to: a fire, defective propulsion machinery, steering or navigation equipment (including AIS and radar), any towing vessel unable to control it’s tow or can only control with difficulty, grounding, striking of an obstruction or aid to navigation whether in or out of the channel. Masters shall report when **visibility** is less than 1 mile and any **hazardous conditions** not reported in Notice to Mariners or Broadcast Notice to Mariners.

If a vessel has **radio failure**, the master shall attempt to notify “Soo Traffic” by any means available. In such instances, vessels equipped with cellular phones are encouraged to use these devices to make their reports.

VTs St. Marys River reduced the number of voice position reports for vessels equipped with operational AIS.

Those vessels not required to carry AIS, but obliged to participate in the Vessel Movement Reporting System, will continue to report their positions by radio as required by 33 CFR Part 161. Any AIS equipped vessel whose operational system fails must report the condition to the VTS and, at a minimum, resume full voice position reporting.

## **DOWN BOUND REPORTING POINTS (NO AIS)**

- o Whitefish Point (Pre-Call / Initial Report)
- o Ile Parisienne
- o Round Island Light "26"
- o Point Louise
- o Clear of the Sault Locks / east end of the East Center Pier
- o Mission Point
- o Six Mile Point
- o Nine Mile Point
- o West Neebish Channel Light "29"
- o Munuscong Lake Junction Light (Mud Lake)
- o De Tour Reef Light (Final Report)

## **VESSEL REPORTING POINTS (cont)**

**For vessels equipped with operational AIS, VTS St. Marys River requires voice position reports at:**

- o Whitefish Point (Pre-Call / Initial Report)
- o Gros Cap Reef Light
- o Clearing the Sault Locks
- o Nine Mile Point
- o Munuscong Lake Junction Light (Mud Lake)
- o De Tour Reef Light (Final Report)

## **UPBOUND REPORTING POINTS (NO AIS)**

- o De Tour Reef Light (Pre-Call / Initial Report)
- o Munuscong Lake Junction Light (Mud Lake)
- o Nine Mile Point
- o Six Mile Point
- o Mission Point
- o Clear of the locks / west end of the SW Pier
- o Point Louise
- o Round Island Light "26"
- o Gros Cap Reef Light (Final Report)

**For vessels equipped with operational AIS, VTS St. Marys River requires voice position reports at:**

- o 1 hour before De Tour (Precall / Initial Report)
- o De Tour Reef Light
- o Munuscong Lake Junction Light (Mud Lake)
- o Nine Mile Point
- o Clearing the Sault Locks
- o Gros Cap Reef Light (Final Report)

To further reduce non-essential voice communications, the VTS and USACE partnered to increase the "off air" exchange of vessel movement information. Therefore vessels equipped with operational AIS need only call the USACE Lockmaster at:

### **Downbound**

Ile Parisienne Light  
Big Point

### **Upbound**

Mission Point  
Nine Mile Point

## SECTION - III – NAVIGATION REGULATIONS

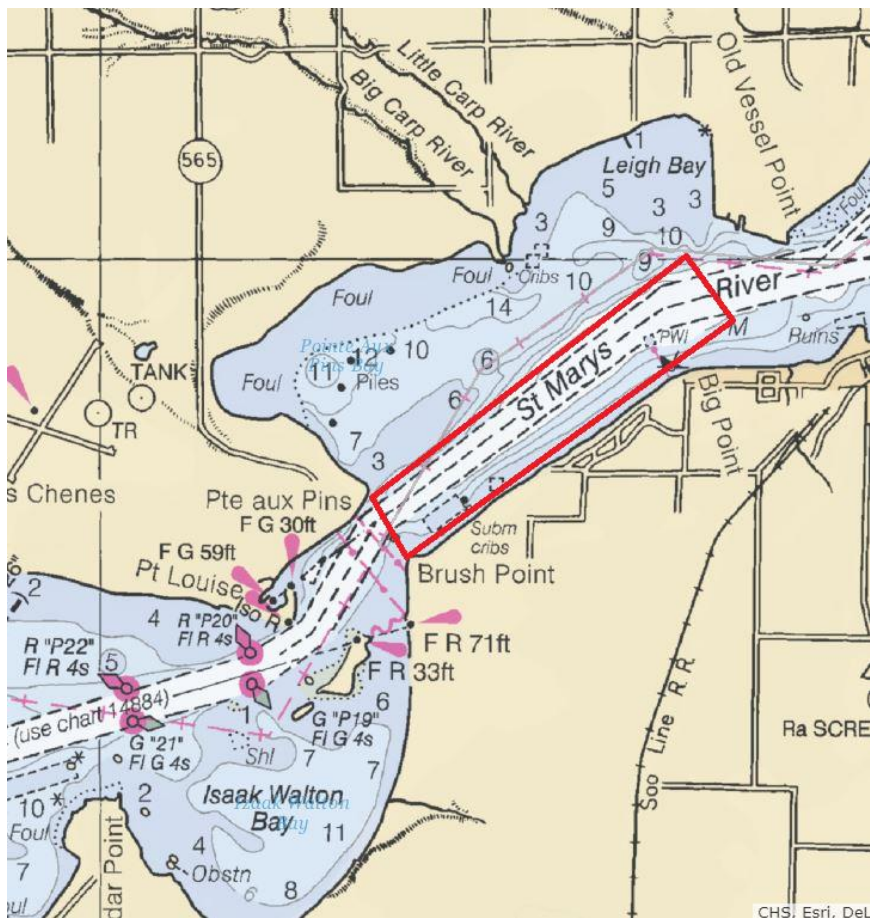
### Anchoring

Vessels should not anchor so as to swing out into the channel or across charted steering courses. During emergency anchorages in a dredged channel, vessels shall anchor as near to the edge of the channel as possible. Vessels shall get underway as soon as the emergency ceases, unless otherwise directed. “Soo Traffic” must be advised of any emergency anchoring as soon practicable.

Vessels in the VTSA anchored for reason of temporary closure or impediment to navigation normally get underway and depart in the order in which they arrived, **unless otherwise directed by “Soo Traffic”**. “Soo Traffic” may advance any vessel in the order of departure to expedite the movement of mails, passengers, cargo of a perishable nature, or facilitate passage through any channel by reason of special circumstance. Vessel size and lock assignments will be taken into consideration by the VTS when advancing a vessel in the procession order.

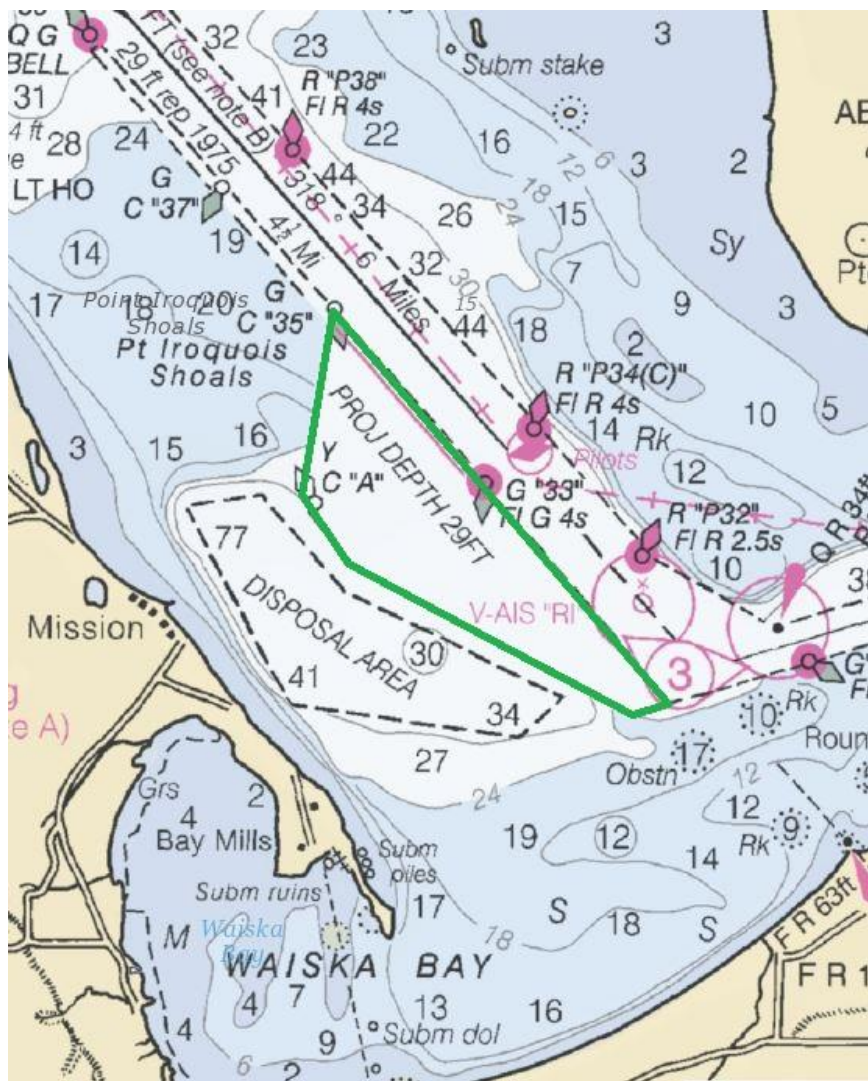
- o Anchored vessels within the VTSA shall notify “Soo Traffic” with the time of anchorage and position in reference to a geographical object.
- o Vessels shall notify “Soo Traffic” one hour or as timely as possible prior to getting underway from anchorage.
- o See chart inserts of this manual for information on designated and prohibited anchorage areas within the St. Marys River.

**Unauthorized Anchoring.** No vessel shall anchor at any time in the area southward of the Point Aux Pins Range between Brush Point and the waterworks intake crib off of Big Point or within 400 yards of the intake crib in any direction.

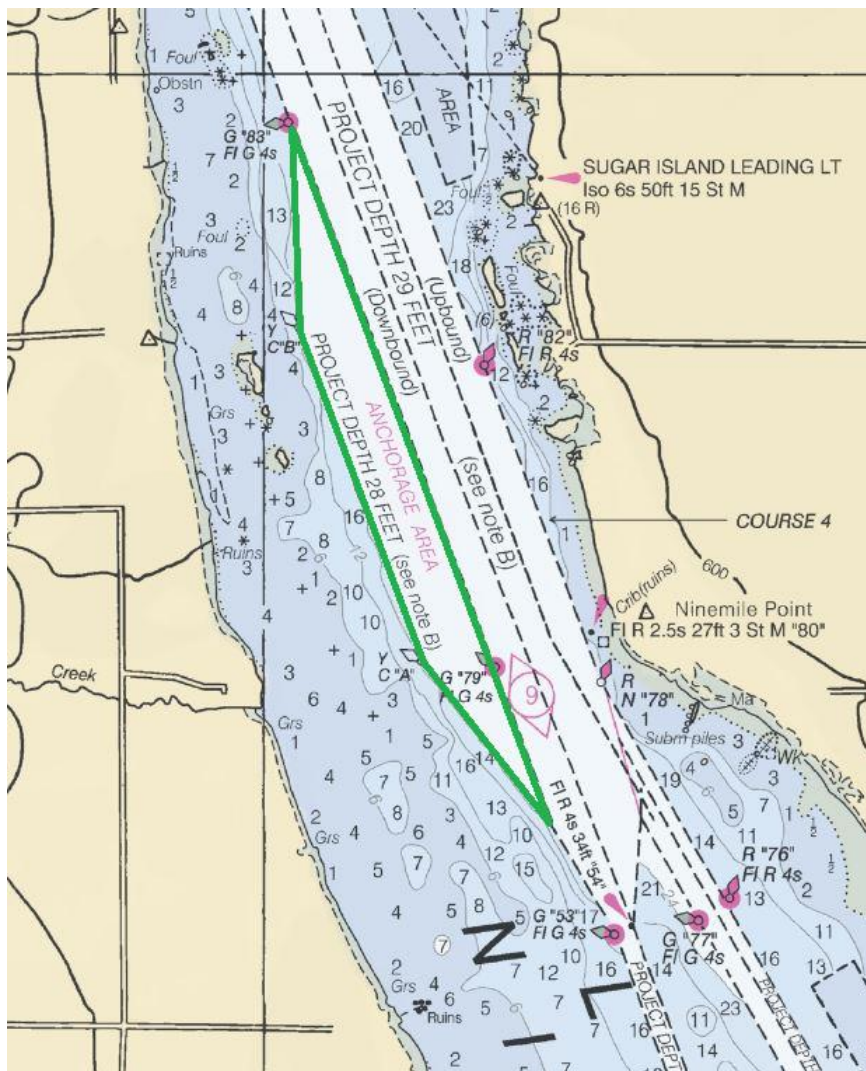


No vessel shall anchor at any time in the area southward of the Point Aux Pins Range between Brush Point and the waterworks intake crib off of Big Point or within 400 yards of the intake crib in any direction.

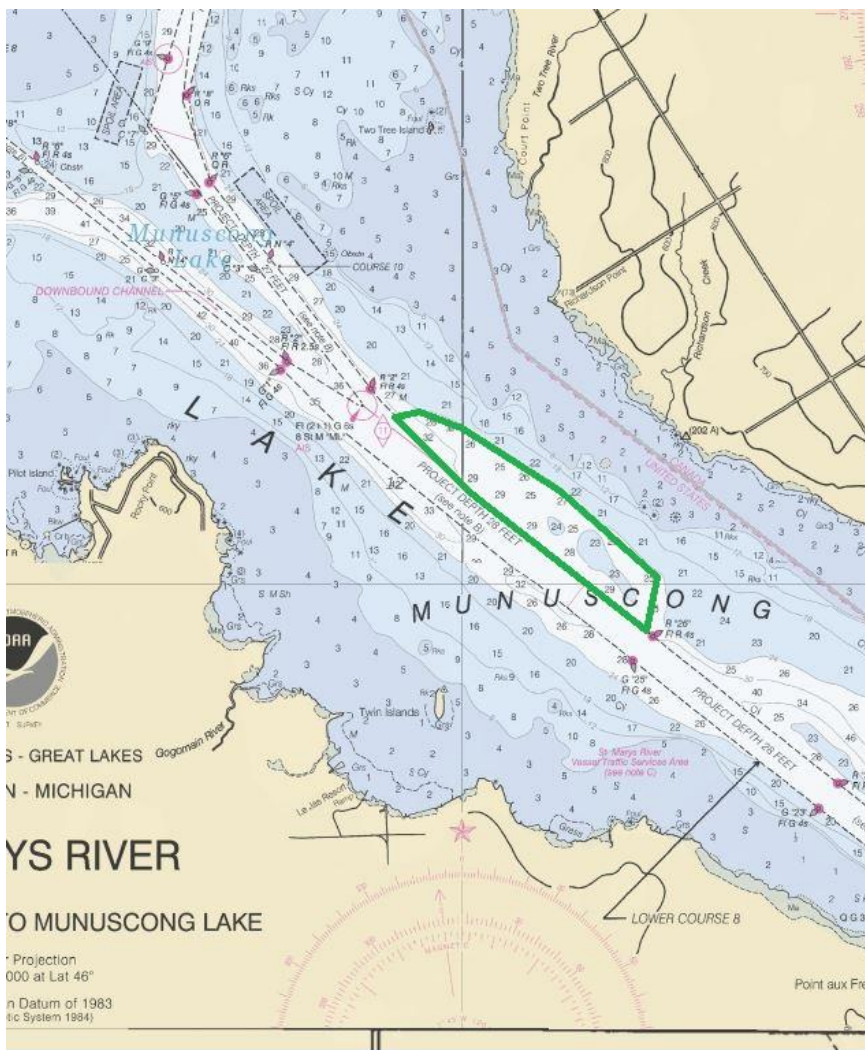




Waiska Bay Anchorage

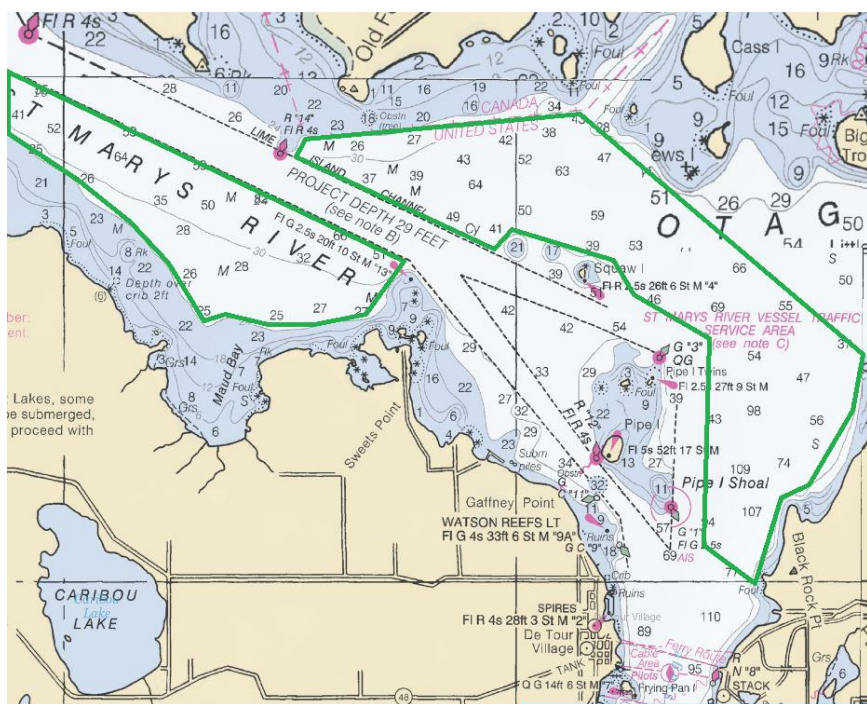


Hay Lake Anchorage



Mud Lake Anchorage





## Maud Bay and Pot Bay Anchorages

## SECTION - III – NAVIGATION REGULATIONS (cont)

### Speed Limits:

33 CFR Part 164.11 requires the person directing the movement of a vessel to set the vessel's speed with consideration for the damage that might be caused by the vessel's wake, the proximity of the vessel to fixed shore and marine structures, and any local speed limits.

All VTS participants shall adhere to the following established speed limits:

<b>MAXIMUM SPEED LIMIT BETWEEN DESIG POINTS</b>	<b>MPH</b>	<b>KTS</b>
De Tour Reef LT - Sweets Pt LT	14	12.2
Round Is LT - Pt Aux Frenes LT 21	14	12.2
Mud Lake LB "8" – Everen's PT	12	10.4
Everen's PT - Reed PT	9.0	7.8
Reed PT - Lake Nicolet LB"62"	10	8.7
Lake Nicolet LB "62" - Lake Nicolet LT "80"	12	10.4
Lake Nicolet LT "80" - Winter Pt (West Neebish D/B)	10	8.7
Lake Nicolet LT "80" - Six Mile Rear Range LT	10	8.7
Six Mile Pt Range Rear LT – Lower Limit of St Marys River Falls Canal (U/B)	8.0	7.0
Lower Limit of St Marys River Falls Canal (D/B)	10	8.7
Upper Limit of St Marys River Falls Canal – Point Aux Pins Main LT	12	10.4

## **SPEED LIMITS (cont)**

A vessel must not navigate any dredged channel at a speed of less than 5 statute miles per hour (4.3 knots).

During periods of ice cover (Operation Taconite) the speed limit is often reduced by 2 MPH for up bound and down bound traffic from Nine Mile Point to Munuscong Lake Junction Light (LLNR 13030) to help keep adjacent ice fields intact.

## **Traffic Rules**

A vessel must proceed only in the established direction of traffic flow in the following waters: West Neebish Channel from Buoy ``53" to Buoy ``1"--downbound traffic only; Pipe Island Course from Sweets Point to Watson Reefs Light--downbound traffic only. Middle Neebish Channel from Buoy ``2" to Buoy ``76"--upbound traffic only; and Pipe Island Passage to the east of Pipe Island Shoal and north of Pipe Island Twins from Watson Reefs Light to Sweets Point--upbound traffic only.

A vessel 350 feet or more in length must not overtake or approach within .2 nautical miles of another vessel proceeding in the same direction in the following waterways (unless operating in an ice field):

West Neebish Channel between Nine Mile Point and Munuscong Lake Junction Light;

Middle Neebish Channel between Munuscong Lake Junction Light and Nine Mile Point; and

Little Rapids Cut from Six Mile Point to Buoy ``102".

Johnson Point from Buoy ``18" to Buoy ``22";

Mirre Point from Buoy ``26" to Buoy ``28"; or

Stribling Point from Buoy ``39" to Buoy ``43".

## MISCELLANEOUS WATERWAY INFO

**Towing Vessels** navigating the waters of the St. Marys River VTS area shall:

- o Maintain positive control of tows south of Gros Cap Reef Light.
- o Not impede the passage of any other vessel.
- o Not tow a vessel of 200 feet or less in length with a tow line longer than 250 feet and,
- o Not tow a vessel of 200 feet or over in length with a towline longer than the length of the vessel plus 50 feet.

**River or Channel Closures** are made at the discretion of VTS St. Marys River as visibility or hazards dictate (i.e. reduced visibility or high sustained winds). Closures are made after giving due consideration to vessel and environmental safety and the needs of all VTS users.

Vessels stopped/anchored/positioned in any part of the VTSA by reason of temporary closure of a channel or an impediment to navigation shall get underway and depart in the order in which they arrived, unless otherwise directed by Vessel Traffic Service St. Marys River. Vessel Traffic Service St. Marys River may advance any vessel in the order of departure to expedite the movement of mails, passengers, cargo of a perishable nature, to facilitate passage of vessels through any channel by reason of special circumstance, or to facilitate passage through the St. Marys Falls Canal.

## **FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS**

### **What information must I give when reporting an AtoN Discrepancy?**

When reporting an AtoN discrepancy to “Soo Traffic”, you should provide the aid’s name and its light list number along with a description of the discrepancy.

### **How do I obtain the water levels for the river?**

Water levels (SW Pier, US Slip, Little Rapids Cut, and Rock Cut) may be obtained by either contacting the Lock Master (WUE-21) on channel 14 or “Soo Traffic” on channel 12. Water levels are also available from NOAA via their web site at <https://tidesandcurrents.noaa.gov/ports/textscreen.shtml?port=sl> or by calling (301) 713-9596 for voice access to all great lakes stations. The water levels may also be shared via AIS binary messaging.

### **What information must I give when reporting a grounding of a vessel?**

The Master should make notifications to “Soo Traffic” once the grounding has occurred. Vessels should carry onboard a Great Lakes Regional Waterways Management Form, Grounding Information Worksheet. The following information should be provided within the first 15 minutes of the incident:

- o Location of the incident (Lat/Long or geographic pos’n )
- o Known damage to the vessel
- o Is the vessel taking on water
- o Immediate danger to the crew/injuries



## **FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS (cont)**

- o Any spill of cargo/fuel (pollution)
- o The rest of the grounding information worksheet and a Report of Mishap (CG-2692) should be filled out, as soon as the Master knows conditions on the vessel. If the vessel does not have this form “Soo Traffic” may provide one via fax machine or email.

### **Is there a way for “Soo Traffic” to detect fog or give reports for the upper river?**

There is currently one VTS camera located above the Sault Locks at the Birch Point Range. This single camera coupled with reports coming from participating vessels assist with the determination of visibility above the locks.

### **What vessel information should I provide to “Soo Traffic” if it is the vessels first time transiting the river?**

- o Proper spelling of the vessels name
- o Flag
- o Lloyds/IMO number (Should be 7 digits)
- o Call Sign
- o Documented Length
- o Documented width/beam
- o Documented Gross and Net tonnage
- o Horse Power of the vessel
- o Does the vessel have a bow/stern thruster and stern anchor
- o Vessels Shipping Company name and where it's located (City and Country)

### **What if I think there is suspicious activity or a terrorist threat?**

Immediately contact Sector Sault Sainte Marie at 906-635-3233 or the National Response Center at 1-800-424-8802.

## SECTION – IV – WINTER NAVIGATION

**Domestic Icebreaking:** By executive order, the Coast Guard is responsible for conducting ice breaking operations on the navigable waterways of the United States.

VTs St. Marys River, under the direction of Captain of the Port Sault Sainte Marie, manages the day to day activities associated with Operation Taconite. These duties include the coordination of ice breaking resources, traffic management, liaison between other ice breaking operations, and industry representatives.

As a matter of safety, U.S. Coast Guard icebreakers will not normally perform icebreaking escorts at night or during periods of reduced visibility. Should the situation dictate, a night/low visibility escort will be considered on a case-by-case basis and only when the Commanding Officer of the assigned icebreaker, and the master of the vessel to be escorted, consider the associated risks justified.

Because of the narrow channel and restricted turns in the St Marys River, specifically in the Munuscong, West and Middle Neebish Channels, the Incident Commander (COTP Sault Sainte Marie) directs all tank vessels to be escorted by a Coast Guard ice breaker between Nine Mile Point and the Munuscong Lake Junction Light. These escorts will not normally be conducted at night.

**Special Reports.** During Operation Taconite each day by 1500 (GMT), fleet operators shall provide the VTS a report with the positions of their vessels. The report shall contain their vessel's ETA's to the following points:

De Tour Reef Light (Up Bound St Marys River)  
Whitefish Point (Down Bound St Marys River)  
Round Island (West Bound Straits of Mackinac)  
Lansing Shoal (East Bound Straits of Mackinac)

In addition, fleet operators are to insure that an updated report is provided should a vessel's ETA change by more than six (6) hours.

## **WINTER NAVIGATION (cont)**

**Aids to Navigation.** Floating lighted and unlighted buoys are changed out in the Fall and Spring in accordance with the Light List. Winter markers are less susceptible to ice damage and can be replaced at a much lower cost than the lighted summer buoys. Mariners are reminded buoys may be off station or missing from station due to shifting ice.

**Waterway Closures/Restrictions.** During the winter navigation season (16-Jan – 24 Mar), several regional waterways may be closed. VTS St. Marys River or the Captain of the Port closes or opens these channels as ice conditions require after giving due consideration to the protection of the marine environment, waterway improvements, aids to navigation, the need for cross channel traffic (e.g., ferries), the availability of icebreakers, and the safety of the island residents who in the course of their daily business must use naturally formed ice bridges for transportation to and from the mainland.

Under normal seasonal conditions, a waterway is closed once each winter then reopened in the spring when the ice abates. When a channel is to be closed, Sector Sault Sainte Marie will issue a notification 72 hours prior to its closure. Sector Sault Sainte Marie will make this notification via Broadcast Notice to Mariners and local media (press release).

During the Winter Navigation Season the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers will install Temporary Lighted Ice Buoy 98B above the Sugar Island Ferry crossing at Mission Pt. The buoy marks the upstream limits of the East Boom Anchor System. When LIB 98B is installed the available channel width for navigation is restricted to 385ft. Due to the channel restriction, VTS directs no meeting or overtaking in Little Rapids Cut from Light 98 to Mission Pt Obstruction Light C.

## **WATERWAY CLOSURES**

**West Neebish Channel.** When West Neebish Channel is closed, Middle Neebish Channel becomes an alternating one-way traffic route under the control of the VTS. In some cases Middle Neebish Channel, courses 5 through 10, are used as a two-way route with the up bound vessels using the Easterly 197 feet of the channel (vessels with a draft of 20 feet or more must get permission from "Soo Traffic" before proceeding), and the down bound vessels using the Westerly 295 feet. In these situations, vessels 350 feet or greater must not meet in the following waterways:

- o Johnson Point - Buoy "Q18" to Buoy "22"
- o Mirre Point - Buoy "Q26" to Buoy "28"
- o Stribling Point - Light "39" to Buoy "43"

**Pipe Island Course.** The up bound course to the east and north of Pipe Island is closed to facilitate icebreaking operations in the lower river. The down bound channel becomes an alternating one-way route.

**Speed Limits.** During Op Taconite the speed limit is reduced by 2 MPH (1.7 KTS) for up bound and down bound traffic from Nine Mile Point to Munuscong Lake Junction Light (LLNR 13030).

When tracks are clearly established, it is highly beneficial to leave adjacent ice fields intact. This is especially true in the vicinity of island ferries and in the Middle and West Neebish Island Channels, but is generally true throughout the river.

## **VTS CONTACT INFORMATION**

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### **Useful Links:**

[https://www.navcen.uscg.gov/?pageName=vtsLocations#VTS\\_SOO](https://www.navcen.uscg.gov/?pageName=vtsLocations#VTS_SOO)

<https://homeport.uscg.mil/port-directory/sault-ste-marie>

<https://www.lre.usace.army.mil/Missions/Operations/St-Marys-River-MI/>

<https://tidesandcurrents.noaa.gov/ports/index.html?port=sl>

<https://tidesandcurrents.noaa.gov/ports/textscreen.shtml?port=sl>

<https://www.glerl.noaa.gov/>

<https://iceweb1.cis.ec.gc.ca/Prod/page2.xhtml?CanID=11080&lang=en&title=Great+Lakes>

## NOTES